

Clinton Herald
Clinton, IA
Circ. 12440
From Page:
1
6/28/2005
41572



Clinton to learn of Great Places tonight

DÈS MOINES (AP) — Anita Walker and her team are trying to get Iowans to brag a little.

Everywhere she goes, Walker hears residents talk about how great it is to live in their town or region, whether it's because of a lake, the

peaceful countryside, a historical neighborhood or the friendly people.

So, she tells them, why not let everybody else know about it?

That's idea behind the Iowa Great Places initiative, a program that will use the

resources of 18 state agencies to help cities or regions showcase their strengths and unique features. The goal is to attract people, which in turn

might attract jobs. Or at least draw tourists.

"When you have great places for people to live, they

become great places for entrepreneurs to start a business," Walker, director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, said during an interview with reporters and editors from The Associated Press. "They become great places for businesses to locate

because they know there is an ability to attract a work force."

Local members of an ad hoc steering committee have been meeting since April to develop a Great Places proposal.

Great —

Please turn to page 2A.

Great —

Continued from page 1A

The committee will make a presentation on its progress at tonight's Clinton City Council committee of the whole meeting.

According to information supplied to the council, the group surveyed more than 50 community members, with a special focus on young people to determine what people feel makes Clinton a great place and how to enhance that perception.

The top responses of the committee members and community survey were the special role and position of the Mississippi River in Clinton and the general sense of closeness and friendliness of the town itself.

The group formed a vision statement and has been operating under the goals it established:

"Expand and improve the public spaces of the six-plus mile Clinton riverfront; connect the dots of existing public spaces to produce a Grand Promenade extending along the entire riverfront from Eagle Point Park to the (U.S. 30) bridge; and make the riverfront, including the downtown business districts, the focal point of the community."

Details about how such goals will be accomplished will be explained to the council tonight. Following that, the committee will send an "invitation" to the state, which in turn will assign two "coaches" to help the committee develop its offer, ultimately to be presented in September.

The ad hoc group hopes Clinton is one of three pilot sites identified in October by a 12-member advisory group made up of Iowans younger than 40. If so, a Great Places partnership agreement will be finalized by Dec. 31.

Walker has been promoting "Great Places" since Gov. Tom Vilsack announced the program in March. A native of Southern California, Walker has found Iowans to be a self-deprecating lot. They're proud of their state, but reluctant to

talk it up.

Part of her job has been prodding communities to speak out for themselves by taking part in Great Places.

"There is no shortage of creativity in this state," Walker said. "What we need is confidence."

That became apparent to Walker at a recent meeting for southwest Iowa communities, when participants were asked to describe a great place.

"Every single one of them described the place where they lived," she said. "So it isn't the fact that people can't recognize what's good. I think what's lacking is the confidence to take that and capitalize on it."

That where the Great Places program comes in, an effort Walker describes as one-stop shopping for help.

It starts with a community, organization or region submitting a proposal to make their area a better place to live. It doesn't have to be a new building or highway improvements. It could be extending a trail, showcasing a scenic byway, a main street business district or a neighborhood of Victorian homes.

The coaches actually are two consultants assigned work with local organizers to determine which state programs could help them.

Do they need a historical preservation tax break or assistance from the Housing Finance Authority? Maybe they need expertise from the Department of Transportation or Department of Natural Resources. The communities won't have to figure that out. That will be the job of the 40 state employees who are being trained as coaches.

"That's very creative and might work," said Jacky Adams, a preservationist in Red Oak who attended the southwest Iowa meeting.

"They will take care of plugging in people that will help you. I think that will be good. One of the things rural communities lack is personnel. This may fill that gap."

Proposals must be submitted by Friday and the advisory

board will pick three as pilot projects in the fall. A major goal: Quick results.

"We mean things that are measurable and clear cut," Walker said. "For example, a 10 percent increase in housing in the downtown or a connection to a trail that goes around the community to the business district."

"Very specific, clear results on a timeline. And we need them quickly. Since this is our test year, if we don't have success and results, we probably won't have Great Places the next year."

The Great Places team held 10 forums around the state to promote the program and gauge interest. Members of the Clinton committee attended three — a large group outing to the forum in Dubuque and small groups to events in Cedar Rapids and Muscatine. The committee felt it could learn more about the program by listening to ideas of other Iowans in the open dialogue segment of the forums.

Walker has been encouraged by the turnout — more than 200 people attended in Clear Lake — and hopes that leads to dozens of proposals.

"I wouldn't be surprised if it's over 100," she said.

They'll hear from the Bellevue area for sure, said John Hoff, Chamber of Commerce president in the Mississippi River city of 2,350. Hoff said the city wants to promote its appealing riverside location, proximity to Dubuque and the Quad-Cities and several housing developments under construction.

"Anybody who could see the sunrise I saw this morning would think there's no point in looking anyplace else for a scenic area," Hoff said. "I think we have the resources, I think we have the locale to attract people."

"I don't think we're trying to entice a lot of heavy industry. I don't think we'd have success. But we've got a quality of life we don't think a lot of other people can compare with."

Clinton Herald
Clinton, IA
Circ. 12440
From Page:
2
6/28/2005
41572





Clinton Herald Associate
Editor Scott T. Holland con-
tributed to this report.

Clinton Herald
Clinton, IA
Circ. 12440
From Page:
2
6/28/2005
41572